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AUTHOR Shultz, Greta S.
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ABSTRACT

This paper calls for a re-examination of the epistemological building blocks on which multiple forms of educational inquiry rest, shifting from the contextualizing to the retextualizing of knowledge, moving from paradigmatic and humanist analyses to discursive strategies, and de-emphasizing "voices" to accentuate instead the multiple logical and rhetorical "languages" being spoken. By attending to the performativity of educational discourse, its productivity and effects, it will no longer be necessary to attribute motivation, purpose, or conspiracy to the agents of humanism (authors, researchers, teachers, and administrators). Making visible the mechanics of knowledge production in education provides an analytical purchase to conceive and execute alternatives. The categories, classifications, and epistemological building blocks that constitute the subjects and objects of discourse predetermine the form and performativity of reform efforts directed at public education. (Contains 54 references.) (SLD)

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Greta S. Shultz
10 Cronin Hill Rd.
Hatfield, MA 01038
email: greta.shultz@the-spa.com

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G. Shultz

RETHINKING INQUIRY: TOWARD A POSTSTRUCTURALIST ANALYTICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN EDUCATION

Why do we keep reforming again and again? (Cuban, 1990)

> The contribution of 'post' scholarship...to the future of curriculum will not reside in a simple celebration of ambiguity, or life as play, but in the articulation of the ethical foundation upon which all projects of deconstruction rest, namely vigilance against every cultural, political, economic, and social force that would foreclose on the work of thinking itself. And thinking is the art of relating things, of showing connections. 'Post' scholarship labours not in the service of dogmatic ambiguity, but in the service of the essential openness of life, of its unpredictable unfolding, but in the midst of which we 'find' ourselves through our relatedness. (D.G. Smith, 1999b, pp. 74-75)

Considering AERA's theme this year, "Creating Knowledge in the 21st Century: Insights from Multiple Perspectives," I start by assuming a broad span of epistemological loyalties among educators in this the first—or nearly first, depending on how you're counting--year of a new (Christianity-demarcated) century. A mere glance at this year's conference program suffices to indicate the range of epistemological propensities animating the "field" (that's "field" in the much-loved-or-despised quotation marks, as discussed below): from "Quantitative Issues in Performance Assessment" to "Technology Integration and Qualitative Research: Exploring Methodological Possibilities" to "Educational Research and Advocacy." My goal in the following pages is to suggest that we (educators, an unruly lot not easily tamed by the deceptively unified sign, "we") can best learn from and appreciate divergent perspectives through self-reflexive gestures. That is, I propose that we examine the

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epistemological building blocks upon which our multiple forms of educational inquiry rest, shifting from the *con*textualizing to the *text*ualizing of knowledge, moving from paradigmatic and humanist analyses to discursive strategies, de-emphasizing a cacophony of "voices" and accentuating instead the multiple (logical and rhetorical) "languages" being spoken. I contend that the advantages of such a move are that a) by attending to the performativity of educational discourse itself, to its productivity and its effects, we are liberated from the seduction of "intent", we are no longer required or permitted to attribute motivation, purpose or conspiracy to the individual, free-standing agents of humanism (e.g. authors, researchers, teachers, administrators), and b) by making visible both the mechanics of knowledge production in education and its panoply of effects we gain the analytical purchase needed to conceive and execute alternatives.

Hoffman (1999) writes, "A form of inquiry that encourages us to look with a critical eye at the categories that we are using is of utmost importance - for it is only when we do so that we can generate alternatives to what already exists" (p. 481). Following scholars whose critical analyses in education turn on the play of language and logic in discourse (e.g., Cherryholmes, 1988, Britzman, 1995, 1996, Lather, 1991, 1996, Walkerdine, 1984, 1985, 1990, Hargreaves, 1994, Spivak, 1993, Kiziltan, Bain, Cañizares, 1990). I attempt to put education's own classificatory mechanisms under erasure, to make education's knowledge-producing apparatus the object of investigation. Hence my "disruptive admonition[s]" (Aoki, 1999, p. 31) in the preceding paragraph--my bothersome, bracketed, subordinate clauses, my littered parentheses, my unfettered use of quotation marks. Taking a step back from educational "theory and practice," I want to look at the analytical categories we use in the very imagining and doing of the work of making knowledge in education. I want to move from theory to knowledge, from practice to performance.

Analytical Strategies

Using Foucauldian and Derridean analytical strategies, I attempt to isolate the performativity--that is, the workings or productivity--of certain of education's discursive elements. Following Foucault,[1] I am interested in education's "regimes of representation," that is, the rules and mechanisms whereby the discourse, as a logical system, represents and therefore constitutes the world ("the real")—in ways which all too often pass unnoticed when we read, think or act from a position inside the discourse. Following Derrida, I strive to open up education's texts, to release their playful potential, to suspend or defer meaning just long enough to de-center the (limited, privileged) meaning commonly, and "common-sensically" ascribed to particular forms and structures, and to permit the re-inscription of these forms with "new" (although always already present in the traces of other signs, present by their absence) meanings. Through the deployment of such analytical maneuvers, I aim not to destroy or diminish the power of education's sense-making conventions (e.g., assumptions, classifications) but, more accurately, to follow Walkderdine (1985) in "deconstruct[ing] the power of their obviousness" (p. 238). Running Cuban's (1990) question, "Why do we keep reforming again and again?" through the poststructuralist[2] analytical mill, I hope to investigate not the humanists' call to explain our motivations but rather the very

[1] I draw on Foucault's (1991) comments on "regimes of truth" and "regimes of practices" (p. 75) as well as his discussion (1980) of the "'traits' of a political economy of truth" (pp. 131-132). The point is the search for modes of reasoning, forms of rationality, epistemological criteria which constitute and order "reality."

[2] For brevity, I am sidestepping discussions of the distinctions between postmodernism, deconstruction and poststructuralism, as well as the various sub-strands of each. Readers unfamiliar with debates about the "post," with particular relevance to education, are advised to consult, for example, Cherryholmes, 1988; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991; Kanpol, 1992; Lyotard, 1984; Kincheloe, 1993; Usher and Edwards, 1994; Purpel and Shapiro, 1995; Britzman, 1995; Hargreaves, 1994; Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998; Paulston, 1999). For the present purposes, I use the terms "poststructuralist" and "deconstructive" to invoke attention to the inconsistencies between language and logic in text, as well as to the infinitely productive, rather than referential or descriptive, capacity of discourse.

intelligibility and logical necessity of education's endlessly iterable chain of education re/form(s).

Phelan (1998), speaking not of education but of performance studies, "transpos[es] and transcrib[es] 'the future of the field' into 'the ends of performance'" (p. 5).[3] What, and how, does education perform, as knowledge is "'created'... in the 21st century"? Pollock (1998b) contends that, "Writing that takes up the performativity in language is meant to make a difference" (p. 95). Casting performance "as the *doing* of language" (Pollock, 1998a, p. 20), and drawing on Austin's (1962) distinctions between the "performative" and "constative" dimensions of language use, how can we read/hear/speak/write education differently, in ways that "make a difference" in the 21st century?

Border Crossings

> It is only possible to criticize existing institutions from *within* an inherited language, a discourse that will always have been worked over in advance by traditional concepts and categories. What is required is a kind of internal distancing, an effort of defamiliarization which prevents concepts from settling down into routine habits of thought. (Norris, 1987, p. 16)
>
> There is still plenty of evidence of boundary maintenance in academia...and this will not change while there is a commitment to maintaining knowledge hierarchies. The desire to maintain monopolies over areas of knowledge encourages ritual practices designed to protect the sacred status of established approaches to understanding. (Sibley, 1995, p. 127)

I submitted the proposal for this paper to AERA's Division D, "Measurement and Research Methodology," despite "commonsensical" wisdom that it would perhaps "fit" better in Division G or even B. My rationale was to emphasize the analytical purchase inherent in poststructuralist *methods*, and not to focus on the context ("international," as discussed below) or content. To challenge the stability of the boundaries of the Association's

[3] I am indebted to Brian Casemore (Louisiana State University) for insightful discussion of this literature.

Divisions (its "ritual practices") is to enact a "defamiliarization" that opens up possibilities for unsettling the taken-for-granted. Pollock (1998b) says that performative writing "recognizes the extent to which writing displaces, even effaces 'others' and 'other-worlds' with its partial, opaque representations of them, not only not revealing truths, meanings, events, 'objects' but often obscuring them in the very act of writing" (pp. 82-83). What strategies (methods) and their "others" or "other-worlds" have been displaced through the writing of education's disciplinary, "division" boundaries? Can we write our way through to the "*in-between* space[s]" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38) of those boundaries, to a "'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha, 1990c, p. 211)?

Arguing for a leap across disciplinary and discursive chasms, I propose destabilizing the boundaries marking commonsensical distinctions in education (e.g., "context" and "method" as well as sub-disciplinary foci such as "U.S." and "international" or "comparative" education). Drawing on analytical moves deployed in the realm of international development education,[4] I propose that deconstructive strategies reveal the intelligibility and the (frequently unintended) effects of educational discourse-practices, irrespective of "context." I propose that recent poststructuralist investigations into educational assistance efforts in developing countries yield insights into the limits to and possibilities for knowledge production in education, as education both re/presents and performs ("does things with," to paraphrase Austin) the "third world" or "industrialized nations." Seeking the "in-between spaces," ferreting out the rigid demarcations in educational knowledge production and their effectivity ("*what* they do"), I read educational texts from two traditionally distinct worlds: U.S. educational reform planning documents and

[4] I mean by this term a specific set of textual, discursive and institutional practices carried out by a host of agencies ranging from multi-lateral assistance organizations (e.g., the United Nations network) to single government agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to grassroots, community-based and non-governmental organizations.

practitioner and research documents developed by and for international assistance agencies. On the U.S. side, I look at the Goals 2000 reform effort, drawing on texts from the U.S. Department of Education (Winters, 1995) and the National Governors Association (its 1994 publication, Communicating with the Public about Education Reform, and David and Goren, 1993).[5] I look at the "voices from the field" component of Goals 2000, citing from that section in Communicating with the Public, noting that the "field" contributors are "seven individuals with extensive experience in dealing with the public on education issues" (p. 3), for example, directors and vice-presidents of policy-makers' groups and lobbying groups. On the international development front, I cite from World Bank (Wolff, Schiefelbein and Valenzuela, 1994; Choksi, 1995) and UNICEF (Rihani, 1992) texts. In the pages that follow, I examine the discursive play of language and logic as it is enacted through these texts, highlighting the performativity of writing both in the texts I read and in my written responses to them.

Discursive performances

Elsewhere (Shultz, 1999), I have formulated initial steps toward an analytics of the international development discourse, investigating in particular development's encounters with education. The contours of the problematic as I elaborate it are three regimes of representation, History, Geography and Governmentality, and three guiding modes of rationality, economistic, developmentalist and bureaucratic. Following in the wake of that earlier work, I would like within the limited scope of this paper to discuss

[5] My rationale for drawing on texts of the early to mid-1990s is that their modes of theorizing change in education undergird reform gestures currently deployed.

discursive treatment of national and public "performances" in the texts under review. My discussion is organized around groupings of subjectivities (identities, personal and/or organizational subjective positionings) as they are knowable and even inevitable by reason of their logical and rhetorical grounding.

The "Worlding of Infinite Geometries"[6]:

Homi Bhabha (1990a) writes of "the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation" (p. 3). His project is to "encounter the nation *as it is written*" and to "turn the familiar two-faced god into a figure of prodigious doubling that investigates the nation-space in the *process* of the articulation of elements: where meanings may be partial because they are *in media res*, and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made..." (pp. 2-3).

In the international development discourse, I have shown (Shultz, 1999) that a map of the world is drawn according to diagnostic and curative formulae, specifically those formulae for economic and industrial growth which conform to the abilities of the development assistance apparatus. That is, problems are cast in terms that development can solve (e.g., the problem of overpopulation in Region X is addressed through family planning programs, the problem of girls' domestic labor is addressed through the provision of time- and labor-saving devices). Following that logic, the "the world" (nations, regions), then, is understood (represented) through the common language of problems/solutions and economic performance. Let's look, for example, at these excerpts from World Bank and UNICEF documents:

[6] Spivak, 1994, p. 54.

> Although LAC[7] has shown persistent improvement over the twenty-five year period, it has not been able to significantly lessen its gap with industrialized countries (IC's). At the present rate of improvement, the Asian NIC's[8] will be able to "catch-up" with the IC's in the not so distant future, yet LAC will continue to lag behind at its current distance. In primary education, in LAC about 66% of students complete primary education. (Wolff, Schiefelbein and Valenzuela, 1994, p. 14)

> Like Ataturk [political leader in Turkey in the 1920s], many MENA[9] leaders may have demonstrated a commitment to equality and the universal right to education. (Rihani, 1992, p. 37)

Consider the groupings of nations and regions introduced in the above citations: "LAC," "NIC," "MENA," "IC." They are presented as self-evident, as if the casual observer might pick up a popular map in a shopping mall bookstore and find "The Latin American and Caribbean region" (LAC, above) inscribed there. Readers of development education texts find such subtitles as "learning and achievement in LAC," "LAC repetition and completion rates," "student teacher ratios in LAC," as if LAC were a place, a geographic location whose residents would self-identify in that manner: "I am Maria Rodriguez, a LAC-ian, of northern LAC." The reader expects that a political leader from anywhere in the Middle East or North Africa would self-identify as a "MENA leader." We find as well entire administrative and bureaucratic divisions devoted to these artificially constructed "regions" (e.g., "the LAC desk"), specialists in each of these particular geographic "areas," and technical products produced for them (analyses of "the situation" in Region X). Crush (1995) writes:

> [D]evelopment discourse represents whole countries or regions in 'standardized forms' as objects of development. This tendency finds fruition in the simplistic reaggregation of demarcated units into homogenous swathes of territory that span the globe—the 'developing world,' the 'Third World,' the 'South.' These global spaces are inhabited by generic populations, with generic characteristics and generic landscapes either requiring transformation or in the process of being transformed. (p. 15)

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[7] Latin American and Caribbean region.
[8] Newly industrialized countries.
[9] Middle East and North Africa.

At issue here, as Walkerdine (1985) suggests, is the tendency to "pathologize" difference. That is, time in these passages is performative in ways which do not initially appear obvious. "Differences between countries," Latouche (1992) writes, " [come] to be seen as ...delays" (p. 253). Delays, advances, "catch up" strategies animate reformers' logic, constituting the very objects of reform (the education systems of nations or regions) in the logic's own (economically progressing) terms, even as the "regions" themselves (LAC and MENA) are cast as natural, self-evident and static. Can the nation, or region, "mean" if removed from the gaze of comparison and competition, a gaze constructed through self-referential criteria which pre-determine the "map of the world" in the first place?

Let's look at a similar text, this time from the U.S. literature.

> Are our students and schools doing worse than in the past?... It's not that students are learning less than they used to. In fact, there is evidence that American schools and students, as a whole, are performing as well as ever.... But doing "as well as ever" is not good enough. *The world* has changed; our schools have not. Our educational performance has not kept pace with rising demands in the workplace; *nor have we kept up with other developed countries*. For example, although our National Education Goals call for students to know one foreign language, the European Economic Community recommends that students learn *two* languages in addition to their own native language. (emphasis added, Winters, 1995, p. 11)

Do you hear a familiar ring? Bhabha (1990b) tells us that "[t]he problematic boundaries of modernity are enacted in [the] ambivalent temporalities of the nation-space" (p. 294). Who are the newly constituted, modern nationalities (American schools, American students), and how do they/we mean except out of opposition to other developed and therefore ever-developing national subjects? What is this "world," an entity located in space, yet knowable through the "ambivalence" of time? My point here is that in both the Goals 2000 literature and in development education discourse, cross-national comparisons, and the prescriptions which follow from them, achieve taken-for-granted status by the legitimacy of their unspoken (economic, in this case) rationales. The European Economic Community is cited

here, for example, as a taken-for-granted authority and "the world" is intelligible by reason of the "rising demands of the workplace." The "subjects" of cross-national comparisons, whether they be, for example, students, teachers, parents or schools, are constituted as competitors—some better, some worse, some faster, some slower—racing ("keeping pace") with international/not-our-nation(al) marchers on the long road to progress.

The "Progressing" Nation and its "Public"

> If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminancy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness': the heimlich pleasures of the hearth, the unheimlich terror of the space or race of the Other, the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class, the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation, the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice, the *langue* of the law and the *parole* of the people. (Bhabha, 1990a, p. 2)

Much of the explicit rationale for instituting reforms in the U.S. and for providing educational assistance to developing countries is articulated through calls to promote the twin goals of democracy and economy. Then-Governor of Colorado, Ray Romer, writes in the Foreward [sic] to the David and Goren (1993) document, for example:

> Improving our educational system is essential to the economic prosperity of this country. We must ensure that all our students have the skills and knowledge to compete in a world economy and actively participate in a democracy. A society that does not value the education of its citizens cannot secure its future. The challenge for governors is to continue their strong leadership to sustain support for systemic reform as the transition is made from the old system to the new. (p. 5)

Similarly, A.M. Choksi (1995), then-Vice President of Human Capital Development and Operations Policy at the World Bank, writes:

> Education produces knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. It is essential for civic order and citizenship and for sustained economic growth and the reduction of

> poverty....The civic purpose of education—the sharing of values throughout society—is becoming more salient in light of the widespread political liberalization of the past decade....Research and experience have also led to a deeper understanding of how education contributes to economic growth, the reduction of poverty, and the good governance essential for implementing sound economic and social policies. (p. xi)

Of note, however, is the preponderance of legitimizing *and constitutive* markers on the side of the economy, and a paucity of same for democracy. That is, the evaluative (legitimizing) criteria which assess economic performance outweigh those which assess democratization. As we saw above, a particular "worlding" situates America's performance in the workplace. Despite Goals 2000's admonitions to "Focus attention on education as a public good" (David and Goren, 1993, p. 7), the performance of its prime subjects, students, is cast in purely economistic terms. Winters' (1995) section, "How well are students learning?" (pp. 10-13) depicts, for example, international comparisons of test scores, numbers of hours of homework per day. The range of possible—Foucault (1970) would say "thinkable"[10]—responses to the "How well..." question is limited to measures which make sense by recourse to an invisible, yet omnipresent authority, the economy.

I suggest, however, that while assessing students' performance purely in such limited terms is shortsighted, and at best an imprecise measure of reform efforts to promote two goals, even more important is the very performativity of "student performance." That is, students are constituted--their subjectivity is written—in some ways and not others. They are, for example, imagined, written, situated within conditions of possibility as "future international competitors" (Winters, 1995, p. 11) but not as, say, future voters or school board members, except in the rhetoric of planning and promise (the goals of Goals 2000 or

[10] I refer to his fictional reader of "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" who was struck "by the limitation of our own [system of thought], the stark impossibility of thinking *that*" (p. xv).

the World Bank's initiatives). Implementation and evaluation measures consist in large measure of quantitative assessments of economic, not democratic or civic, performance. Could we imagine, say, "international comparisons" not only of students' hours of homework, but also of hours of participation in school government, community volunteer organizations, political organizations? Could we assess school reform on the basis of percentage of high school graduates who go on to register to vote or to run for public office?

The poststructuralist attention to these markers of permissible and taboo, thinkable and unthinkable in discourse may assist us in addressing Cuban's (1990) question, "Why do we keep reforming again and again?" When inconsistencies between discursive logic and rhetoric are revealed, the range of possible responses to a problem (e.g., endless re/form) is expanded, since the problem is recast in a different light (e.g., we keep reforming because we can't achieve the goals of reform because we only make possible, within the discourse, the achievement of half our goals). In this case, the discourse blocks half its own stated goals; it can't let education be for democracy because it only sees/values/makes possible industrial workers. It rewrites the popular military slogan, saying to children: "Be half of what you can be."[11] Still, enough mechanisms are in place to sustain the discursive drive toward consistency and closure. Yet another round of reforms is unleashed to end (unsuccessfully) the discourse's own self-initiated hunger strike. It wants democracy yet feeds itself only workers.

Further, I contend that the value of analytical strategies which identify inconsistencies between logic and rhetoric in text lies not only in their explanatory potential, but also, and more importantly, in their critical potential. The productive and normative powers of

[11] Looking only at the internal logic of the discourse, we see the half/full disjuncture. Stepping outside the discursive regime, we might even suggest that the range of students' subjectivities be expanded beyond the boundaries of economics/democracy. Casting students as possible musicians or writers or parents might rewrite the formulation, "Be half of what you can be" to, simply, "Be (unquantifiably) *less* than you can be."

education are revealed through its capacity to constitute some—and not other—versions of "the real." If its representations of students are limited to the realm of business or economics, then it constitutes a version of society--"the world"--in accordance with these representations. And students, teachers, educational reformers themselves, will find alternative representations unthinkable. For example, I have explored elsewhere (Shultz, 2000) the development education discourse's representations of the "girl student"—and the limits to those representations—showing that calls to "improve" her attendance and achievement rates in school notwithstanding, the discourse consistently writes her as a childbearer and domestic laborer—thereby reinforcing the very societal norms it seeks to dismantle. Similarly, Smith (1999a), noting "a radical, zealous turn to free market principles and a systematic appropriation of the reins of secular power by the forces of transnational capital," raises the question, "What is education for citizenship if the nation is nothing but a conduit for business globalization?" (p. 94). What indeed? And how might the nation, and its citizens, be otherwise imagined/represented/legitimized? Education reform wants to perform as a "public good," but through the deployment of some and not other subjectivities (e.g., industrial workers, not citizens), it constitutes "the public" in very specific ways. Who, we might ask, comprises education's much-loved public, and for whom are its "goods" good? That is, good on whose terms, and how so?

Let's examine the public, this national population, a bit more closely. Keeping in mind Judith Butler's (1993) observation, "In order to exercise and elaborate its own power, a regulatory regime will generate the very object it seeks to control" (p. 86), we'll look at two representations of "the public" and their discursive positioning within education.

In international development, Duden (1992) and others have traced the genealogy of the sign "population" to advances of the 1950s in disciplines such as economics, statistical

reasoning and demography. The scientific status easily accorded these developments gave rise to a "new language," Duden (1992) writes, which "...made it possible to uncover general truths about mass phenomena even though the cause of each particular action was unknown and remained inaccessible. Populations were attributed forms of 'behaviour', explained now by 'probability'" (p. 148). "People"—and for our purposes, those people residing within national boundaries—were represented from that point forward as "objects which may as well be so many pellets as people... [since] 'population' refers to a reproductive community that meets and mates with a defined probability" (Duden, 1992, p. 148).

My point here is that education—and education *reform* as a particularly potent discursive formation--acts, produces, creates, as we saw above, its objects. We should not be surprised by those instances in which the effects of the discourse upon those objects reflect the tacit logic of the discourse. That is, confronted with a discursively constituted, newly emergent object—no longer "people" but now "population," knowable now through statistical procedures and other mathematical advances--education adopted the discursive form, "population education." Duden (1992) explains:

> Demographers were recognized as experts and demography acquired the status of a technique at the service of development. Reduction in the rate of population growth was now seen as a condition for successful investments in development. High rates of population growth create unemployment faster than jobs, increase the number of mouths to be fed faster than the productivity of rice paddies, squatters faster than people housed in modern facilities, excrement faster than sewers can be built. A population growing faster than the output of modern goods and services...*frustrates development goals*.... (p. 151)

Animated by a logic which promoted "development goals" and confronted with a public who continued to behave--casting behavior now in terms of biological reproduction--in opposition to that logic, education could not perform in any other way except to develop an apparatus of family planning curriculum. To focus on "education as a public good," was to use education to reduce the size of that educable public.

Turning now to our second representation of the "public," I cite rather generously from a text produced by one of Goals 2000's "voices from the field." In his section titled "Democracy is hard work," Scott Swenson (1994), vice-president of the Public Agenda Foundation writes:

> The very core of Public Agenda's mission is a fundamental respect for, and faith in, the American public. Given the information, tools, and time to understand the most basic elements of the need for education reform, the public will respond. The problem is that reformers have leapt too far ahead of the public too fast....[T]he public only becomes ready, only supports reform, only overlooks controversy, *when the issues are clearly explained and important concerns...have been addressed*....Reformers have created a vacuum by not addressing the public's concerns about schools and by alienating much of the public from the discussion of reform. That vacuum is being filled by various interest groups as they skillfully manipulate information to benefit their own political agenda. Given the often strident nature of reform critics from both the left and the right, it would be unfortunate if reformers allowed themselves to be drawn into a negative battle. A better response is to recognize that the public schools are the *public's* schools and that there is common ground that can be found on all issues. If reformers choose to slug it out with opponents they will find the public, a potential source of support for reform, alienated even further form the debate and watching the political battle from the sidelines with little or no interest. (pp. 18-19, emphasis in original)

Most notable in this passage is the stark contrast between the discourse's expressed and tacit logical commitments. Rather than promoting the "hard work" of democracy, the text instead denounces democracy's core elements: multiplicity of interests, political engagement, heated debate. The "American public" is written through two opposing subjectivities; one is privileged in the text, and the other marginalized.[12] That is, the Foundation "respects," and has "faith in" a rational, responsive public, capable of understanding the "basic elements" of reform and eager to "overlook controversy." This portrait displays an obedient, if pedestrian, laid-back, manageable group. In contrast, reform critics--given to a "strident" tone and eager to wage a "negative" battle, to "slug it out"--are

[12] I am assuming here the reader's familiarity with Derridean analytical strategies such as the deconstruction of the hierarchy, or privileging, of positions in binary oppositions.

constituted as "special interest groups" guilty of "skillfully manipulat[ing] information to benefit their own political agenda."

Where, we might ask, is evidence for the "hard work of democracy," touted in the section heading? Is democracy not, precisely, the free and often spirited exchange of perspectives, including support for and critique of public propositions, as they are evaluated on the basis of criteria such as individual and group interests? Who, exactly, are the "special" (Other, abnormal, disfavored) groups, and how does their "manipulation" of information differ from reformers' "clear" explanations? Given the overriding logical dictates of the text, it might fit better under the heading, "the hard work of sheep-herding." Whose good? we ask, as attention focuses on "education as a *public* good"?

"Us" and "Them": Speaking Categorically

In the Comparative Education arena, Mehta and Ninnes (2000) seek to identify the friendliness or hostility accorded postpositivist writers in the literature. Deconstructing an unusually hostile account, they note a particular "linguistic technique, the use of the third person plural [as in]: 'They [postpositivists] believe" and 'their [postpositivists'] views'" (p. 8). They write:

> This positional and lexical choice has an effect: it creates an us/them binary, which in turn acts to exclude the possibility of comparative education practitioners being postmodern. Effectively, this statement marks the boundaries of what can be said and thought within the paradigm of the discipline of Comparative Education. (p. 8)

Let's apply their strategy to our own texts under review. What boundaries might we reveal? Consider the following lengthy excerpt from another "voices from the field" piece, this one by Michael Webb (1994), Director of Education and Career Development at the National Urban League, Inc. He begins with a by-now-familiar nod to "the public":

> The term "education reform" means different things to different people. This simple idea lies at the center of the challenge facing those who wish to communicate with the public about reform. Far too often, institutions and organizations that advocate for reform confuse the public's lack of responsiveness with indifference, when the real issue is a quest for meaning. (p. 9)

So far, at least, we find nothing unexpected. Let's continue:

> For example, what does reform mean to a teenage parent who is struggling with issues of personal identity and the demands of a new parenting role? How meaningful is reform to adults who are out of work and who cannot look to the future with optimism? Why should community-based organizations whose offices are flooded with the troubled and the needy rally around the banner of education change? What is the meaning of education reform to individuals who are confronted on a daily basis with violence, community disintegration, and poverty? (p. 9)

We notice here the unleashing of a string of subjectivities: teenage parent, unemployed adult, the needy, victims of violence, members of disintegrating communities, the poor. How will the logic of the text position them? Webb continues:

> Within each of these examples is the basis for an effective communication strategy. However, for many of *us*, an "attitude adjustment" and a series of "reality checks" are in order. Those of *us* who wish to communicate with the public about education reform must be clear about *our* audience, what is important to *it*, and how *our* message relates to *its* needs, concerns, aspirations, and dreams." (emphasis added, p. 9)

Whose good, I asked? Who is us? Who is them? Whose "attitude" needs "adjusting" and whose "reality" needs "checking"? Whose message relates to whom? The poor, the needy, the "other" disenfranchised groups, Webb suggests, will be "invited" into communication, but "they"—and "we"--will not be released from the discursive relations of category and subjectivity.

In/Conclusion

> The writing/subject puts his/her own status on the line not in the debased-Derridean sense of reveling in absence, in the winking spectacle of nakedness to which the emperor is now invited, but in the name of mobilizing *praxis*, breaking the discursive limits of the emperor's stage, and invigorating the dynamics of democratic contest in which the emperor and his new clothes (or lack thereof) are now continually reconfigured. (Pollock, 1998b, p. 96)

My point in this paper has been to suggest that the very categories, classifications and epistemological building blocks which constitute the subjects/objects of discourse, in particular "the public" and "the American population," predetermine the form and performativity of reform efforts directed at public education. We have seen a proliferation of classificatory mechanisms which write particular representations of the public, casting some in privileged positions and others in marginalized positions. I have been arguing for an increased self-reflexive impulse on the part of scholars and practitioners of education, stressing that it is the power of discursive representation which unleashes a string of logical and therefore political effects, rather than rhetorical nods to pluralism, diversity, liberalism, concern for the public good. Pollock got it right, I contend, in calling "us" to "break discursive limits," even disciplinary and professional (i.e., AERA) Divisional limits, I would add. For as we saw in the last Goals 2000 excerpt, mere "inclusion" of the Other (as that familiar, third person "public") does nothing to destabilize the authority of the boundaries, the limits, demarcating normal and deviant, central and peripheral, us and them. "We" still look and perform as we always have; the discursive "field" of vision--a "field" which constitutes relations of power and privilege, knowledge and power, center and periphery--has simply been expanded to include a broader span of Others. What if our Others crossed the border, the disciplinary/divisional boundaries?

Let us go about rewriting the constitution of the subjects themselves, I propose, and put under the magnifiying glass the categories by which they are knowable and commonsensical. What if "voices from the field" included not only "seven individuals with extensive experience in dealing with the public on education issues" (National Governors' Association, 1994, p. 3) but also, say, a K-12 teacher, a student council representative, a Head Start worker, a PTO member? What if we moved "the teenage parent" from the Other (them), "for example" category to the Normal (us), taken-for-granted category? What if we slouched toward reform, not simply on ideological, practical, professional grounds but also on logical, epistemological and therefore political grounds? Could we open up "the field" to an epistemologically democratic process, allowing for the truly "hard work" of democracy, rather than the hard work of (economically productive) work?

Assuming that Lorde (1984) got it right, that "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," in the absence of sustained attention to the workings of education as discourse, we will have no choice, I suggest, but to contribute to the promulgation of the very effects we seek to critique. When we fail to make explicit education's mechanics of knowledge production we remain trapped in, written by, the very discursive power which guarantees the end results so worrisome to us in the first place. We show to Cuban the logical and rhetorical necessity for endless iterations of re/forms, as "we" suffer a "world" (the real) of no one's choosing, borne of competing logics and unexamined inconsistencies—a world in which democracy performs as an empty signifier, displaced by the fear of truly complicated controversy. Can we shift, categorically, from writing that "pathologizes difference," (Walkerdine, 1985) to "writing that makes a difference," (Pollock,

1998b)? Can we write our way out of the mess, to a reconfigured public good? Let us, I propose, take up Pollock's (1998b) challenge, to

> ...*materializ[e] possibility* in and through a kind of writing that is distinctly performative: writing that recognizes its delays and displacements while proceeding as writing toward engaged, embodied, material ends...[toward] a genuinely new politics, a politics that not only refuses to choose between affirmation and reflexivity (or to yield to charges of either rank positivism or wound-licking narcissism) but also refuses to identify writing with either reflexivity or referential affirmation, pursuing it instead as a critical means of bypassing both the siren's song of textual self-reference and the equally dangerous, whorling drain of unreflexive commitment. (pp. 96-97)

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